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DETERMINING THE EMPOWERMENT NEEDS OF MIGRANT RURAL YOUTH TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN IN AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is critical to future food security. With global expectations, it should play a huge role in feeding the world population, which will likely exceed nine billion by 2050. Engaging rural youth in agriculture is the only key to meet the world's food crisis. But the perceptible unenthusiastic attitude of rural youth towards agriculture is a real concern and challenge to the future of agriculture in India. Considering this point of view, a study was conducted among 160 migrant rural youths with agricultural background. The constraints that hinder them from pursuing agriculture as their career and the empowerment needs demanded by them to return and retain in agriculture were earthed out. The study revealed that lack of remunerative prices for farm produce (98.12%), lack of quality inputs (90.00%), lack of finance (80.00%), lack of proper market information (77.00%) and lack of proper market intelligence (76.87%) were the foremost constraints that hamper the rural youth from practicing agriculture. Technological needs like training on entrepreneurial skill development (86.87%), training on effective farm management (83.75%), training on farm diversification (83.12%) and social empowerment needs like creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture (96.87%), formation of farm youth self help groups (90.62%) and inclusion/participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development (83.75%) were the vital empowerment needs essential for the respondents to actively get involved in agriculture.

KEYWORDS: Migrant Rural Youth, Constraints in Agriculture & Empowerment Needs of Youth

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays an important role in rural economy. But the sector is still not lucrative from the point of view of investment and employment. The growth target of agriculture has been set at merely 4.00 per cent, which is not so motivating. Rural youth is an important and vital segment of human resources in agriculture as they are the constructors of the future rural community. Nearly, 30 crores of the nation's youth reside in rural areas (Prabhath, 2011). The rural youth population, both male and female is higher than the urban population. The total rural youth population is 296.2 million as against 130.9 million urban youth population (The Hindu, 2011). Their role in development of agriculture and rural economy is imperative. But the rising number of rural youth turning their back on agriculture is alarmingly increased. They are more interested in going to cities for acquiring necessary skills for getting jobs in companies or corporate sector. Limited access to markets, assets, finance and infrastructure in rural areas, coupled with rapid growth and opportunities in urban areas increasingly makes cities the obvious choice in the search for a better life. But farming is critical to future food security, with global expectations that it can and should play a huge role in feeding the world population, which will likely exceed nine

billion by 2050. The exodus of rural youth means fewer small-scale farmers, today and tomorrow. Considering this issue, the present study has been conducted with the following objectives.

- To earth out the constraints that hamper the rural youth to pursue agriculture as their profession
- To determine the empowerment needs of rural youth for attracting and retaining them in agriculture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of Area and Respondents

The research was carried out in Coimbatore and Tirupur districts of Tamil Nadu by adopting an *ex post facto* research design during 2012-13. Coimbatore and Tirupur districts were selected as they are the major hubs of industrial activity, specifically manufacturing, indicating the influx of labourers from around the region and even other states. Tirupur stands third and Coimbatore stands fourth in Tamil Nadu in receiving the immigrants. The population decadal growth of Tirupur increased from 25.30 per cent to 28.70 per cent in 2001-11, while for Coimbatore it has increased from 17.00 per cent to 19.10 per cent (Census, 2011). The reason behind the increased population decadal growth is the prospect of migration in search of employment in these districts. On the prospect of agriculture, Coimbatore and Tirupur holds a net sown area of 180185 ha and 194079 ha respectively (Season and Crop report of Tamil Nadu, 2010). They relatively possessed a considerable area under agriculture when compared to the other districts that were found to have a high population decadal growth (Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Madurai and Sivagangai districts). Thus, the factors namely, the population decadal growth and the considerable area under agriculture ideally supported this study on attitude of rural youth towards agriculture to be conducted in these two districts of Tamil Nadu. Coimbatore district has 12 blocks and Tirupur district has 13 blocks respectively. Two blocks have been selected from each district and a total of four blocks were selected based on key information from the officials of the State Department of Agriculture, area under agriculture and scope of studying the issue of rural youth migration. Two revenue villages from each blocks were selected purposively based on the information provided by the State Department officials. From each revenue village, 10 fully migrated rural youth and 10 partially migrated rural youth with agricultural background were selected based on key informant method. A total sample of 160 rural youth in the proportion of 80 fully migrated rural youth and 80 partially migrated rural youth were interviewed in accordance with the objective.

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Percentage analysis was used in descriptive analysis for making simple comparisons for calculating percentages. The frequency of the particular cell was multiplied by 100 and divided by the total number of respondents pertaining to particular cell. Percentages were corrected to two decimal places.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Empowerment Needs of Migrant Rural Youth

In order to revolutionize the Indian agricultural sector, an integrated, multidimensional and holistic approach is crucial to attract the rural youth towards agriculture and encourage this demographic dividend to engage in agriculture. For this the constraints persisting in agriculture should be first earthed out to strategize their empowerment needs which are discussed in the succeeding sections.

CONSTRAINTS PERCEIVED To BE ACTIVE IN AGRICULTURE

The following table portrays the constraints that were perceived by the respondents to persist in agriculture.

Table 1: Constraints Perceived to be Active in Agriculture

S. No.	Constraints	FM (n=80)		PM (n=80)		Total(n=160)		
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Rank
1	Lack of technical guidance	48	60.00	51	63.75	99	61.87	VIII
2	Lack of quality inputs	69	86.25	75	93.75	144	90.00	II
3	Lack of farm machineries	51	63.75	47	58.75	98	61.25	IX
4	Lack of finance	80	100	54	67.50	134	83.75	III
5	Lack of proper market information	56	70.00	68	85.00	124	77.50	IV
6	Lack of proper market intelligence	54	67.50	63	78.75	117	73.12	VI
7	Lack of proper marketing linkage	64	80.00	59	73.75	123	76.87	V
8	Lack of proper storage facilities	43	53.75	72	90.00	115	71.87	VII
9	Lack of remunerative prices for farm produce.	77	96.25	80	100	157	98.12	I
10	Lack of farm managerial skills	41	51.25	39	48.75	80	50.00	X

***Multiple responses**

It could be conceived from Table 1 that majority of the rural youth (98.12%) perceived 'lack of remunerative prices for farm produce' to be the prime constraint prevalent in agriculture. India is witnessing a persisting stagnation in agricultural sector due to the amendment of neo-liberalization economic reforms (Banarjee, 2009). Since then the prices of agricultural commodities has started to plummet due the Governments trade policies, the global market openness and the domestic demand and supply situation. The situation of cost of cultivation surpassing the real returns has severely hampered and deflated the levels of farm incomes.

'Lack of quality inputs' was the subsequent constraint perceived by 90.00 per cent of the rural youth. The unavailability of seeds certified varieties and hybrids, adulteration of fertilizers, substandard irrigation equipments and unabated price hikes of quality inputs have restrained the rural youth from venturing into agriculture. The insufficient access to quality inputs also prevail in the rural areas since the import and distribution of inputs is primarily managed by the local elites who rule the supply chain. In addition the dominancy of private sector in input market and the privatization of sale, distribution and import of inputs are also found to restrict the involvement of rural youth in agriculture.

More than 80.00 per cent of the respondents professed 'lack of finance' to be the third major constraint that confined their participation in agriculture. The reason behind it would be the increased adherence of nationalized banks to stringent credit disbursal norms which affects the small and marginal producers in the rural economy. Apparently this would also pave way for the moneylenders to extend their throttlehold on these desperate cultivators.

Nearly 77.00 per cent of the respondents perceived 'lack of proper market information' to be another major prevailing constraint. The rationale behind it would the lack of communication tools which makes them unaware of potential markets and the information on the existing prices of the products in those markets. By and large, the farmers rely on the price information furnished by the traders. The price information provided generally is quite advantageous to the traders, rather than to the farmers. Moreover majority of them rely on extension workers or otherwise on word of mouth, which in most cases might lead to distorted or inaccurate information. This disproportional information on markets might in turn increase market frictions between the farmers and the traders.

This was followed by the constraint namely 'lack of proper marketing linkage' which was perceived to be

rampant in agriculture by more than three-fifth of the respondents (76.87%). The marketing in agriculture is a complex process and it involves a large number of intermediaries. Lack of proper marketing linkage might lead to exploitation of cultivators by middlemen such as petty traders, independent collectors, commission agents and market agents.

Subsequently, 'lack of proper market intelligence' was the next perceived constraint expressed by 73.12 per cent of the respondents. In reality most of the small and marginal farmers more often than not, are in total dark as far as market intelligence is concerned. Moreover the inordinate delay in communicating the forecast to producers and traders might hinder the farmers marketing decisions. For e.g. whether to sell immediately or store the produce, whether to market the produce inland or overseas, during which part of the year the commodity can fetch remunerative prices etc.

More than two-third of the rural youth (71.87%) perceived 'lack of proper storage facilities' to be a major constraint in agriculture. Agricultural commodities are characterized by seasonality, bulkiness and perishability. Inadequate storage facilities might lead to pest infestations, quality deterioration and discoloration which would make the product unfit for marketing due to which the farmer might incur heavy loss.

The perceived constraint namely 'lack of technical guidance' from the extension personnel of state department of agriculture, state agricultural universities and private firms on recent technologies in crop production, crop protection, post harvesting and processing and marketing was reported by 61.87 per cent of the rural youth.

A considerable percentage of rural youth perceived 'lack of farm machineries' (61.25%) and 'lack of farm managerial skills' (50.00%) to be the major constraint raging in agriculture. Farm mechanization would be a better solution to the problem of unavailability of labour and higher labour wages. But the higher procurement price of farm machineries and higher rental cost involved in hiring these machineries were found to bother the cultivators. Moreover the respondents also expressed that they lack the proficiency in handling the farm with all these implacable constraints in agriculture.

The research findings slightly varied from the study conducted by Akpan (2010) who conveyed inadequate credit facility (2.88), poor returns to investment (2.66), poor basic farming knowledge (2.56), insufficient access to tractors & other farm inputs (2.48) and no ready market (2.35) were the foremost constraints faced by the rural youth

Empowerment Needs of Migrant Rural Youth to Return Back and Retain in Agriculture

Having understood the fact that lucrative factors in the urban areas influence the migration of the rural youth, it is also certain that proper developmental initiatives in the native rural areas may facilitate their retention or remigration. These developmental initiatives may predominantly include the need for technology, infrastructure, capacity building and other growth perspectives. Table 2 presents the empowerment needs required by the rural youth that would encourage their participation and retention in agriculture.

Table 2: Empowerment Needs of Migrant Rural Youth

S. No	Empowerment Needs	FM (n=80)		PM (n=80)		Total (n=160)		
	Technological Needs	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Rank
1	Training on contemporary agricultural technologies	62	77.50	44	55.00	106	66.25	VI
2	Training on entrepreneurial skill development	59	73.75	80	100	139	86.87	I
3	Training on effective farm management	69	86.25	65	81.25	134	83.75	II
4	Training on post harvest technologies	48	60.00	67	83.75	115	71.87	V
Table 2: Contd.,								

5	Training on farm mechanisation	39	48.75	58	72.50	97	60.62	VII
6	Training on farm diversification	80	100	53	66.25	133	83.12	III
7	Training on access of information related to agricultural marketing	53	66.25	75	93.75	128	80.00	IV
8	Social empowerment needs							
9	Access to productive agricultural resources	56	70.00	43	53.75	99	61.87	IV
10	Agro - Industrial modernization	41	51.25	54	67.50	95	59.37	V
11	Formation of farm youth self help groups	72	90.00	73	91.25	145	90.62	II
12	Creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture	75	93.75	80	100	155	96.87	I
13	Inclusion/Participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development	63	78.75	71	88.75	134	83.75	III

***Multiple responses**

From the above table, it is explicable that 'training on entrepreneurial skill development' (86.87%) was the foremost preferred technological need required by the rural youth. The capacity building activities related to entrepreneurial skill development would probably create a positive image of farming as a dynamic agribusiness by which youth can become entrepreneurs. Thus agribusiness might hold the solution for rural youth exodus and unemployment in rural areas.

The next preferred technological need was 'training on effective farm management' which was conveyed by 83.75 per cent of the rural youth. The would probably educate the youth on the art of effective use of farm resources and the process by which resources and situations should be manipulated with the available information in order to achieve the optimal functioning of the farming systems.

'Training on farm diversification' was the other technological need that was reported to be required by 83.12 per cent of the rural youth. This would provide knowledge and guide the youth to make suitable changes in the farming techniques for achieving maximum productivity in farming by judicious utilization of agricultural crops and other enterprises suited to a particular agro-climatic conditions, thereby minimizing risk and uncertainty in agriculture.

The technological need on access of information related to agricultural marketing was preferred by 80.00 per cent of the rural youth. This would help them to gain information about potential marketing linkages through market news and market intelligence. It would also facilitate in confident decision making for determining market opportunity and moving their produces to the market to fetch higher price.

Nearly 70.00 per cent of the rural youth preferred the technological need on post harvest technologies. This would enlighten them on the usage of optimum harvest factors, reduction of losses in handling, packaging, transportation and storage with modern infrastructure machinery, processing into a wide variety of products and home scale preservation with low cost technology. This would also lead to establishment of agricultural based rural industries.

Precisely, three-fourth (66.25%) of the rural youth preferred to get hands on training on contemporary agricultural technologies. This would strengthen their insight on various modern agricultural practices like maintenance of soil fertility through the specific provision of nutrients when they are depleted, machine power and technology, use of improved genetics for crops and livestock to enhance yields, use of modern genetic and other techniques to protect plants and livestock from competing diseases, insects, drought, salinity and other threats.

Finally, technological need on farm mechanisation was preferred by 60.62 per cent of the rural youth. This would enhance their expertise on improved farm implements and machinery used for different farm operations and timeliness of operations. It would also serve as the best solution to increase the productivity of land and labour along with reduction in loss of produce and drudgery of farmer.

With respect to social empowerment needs, 'creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture', was the top most empowerment need required by 96.87 per cent of rural youth. The building of institutions based on the principle of cooperatives would go a long way in addressing the problem of waning credit and loan availability for economic activities in the primary sector.

Formation of farm youth self help groups was the next empowerment need required by 90.62 per cent of the rural youth. Self Help Groups are the key strategy to achieve financial inclusion on a significant scale. The formation of cooperative and local youth organizations in farming would make youth become an integral part of an economic activity thus paving a way out to the constraint of lack of finance.

Inclusion/participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development was the subsequent empowerment need expressed by 83.75 per cent of the rural youth. Organizational efforts like SHGs, youth clubs, cooperative societies etc., would create space for the rural youth to debate on issues and participate directly or indirectly in local and national priority setting, budget formation, and delivery of basic thus integrating farm youth into development.

This was followed by the other social empowerment need namely 'access to productive agricultural resources' for more than 60.00 per cent of the respondents. Access to productive agricultural resources like water for irrigation and livestock production, etc and access to productive common property resources like poromboke lands, lands committed to nonagricultural use and grazing land along with would enhance self-esteem and confidence level of rural youth with very small land holdings. Thus control over productive assets would create a sense of belonging and owing which in turn would enhance their strong participation in agriculture.

The finally preferred social empowerment need was 'agro - industrial modernization' which was reported by 59.37 per cent of the rural youth. The establishment of industries, factories and agro-businesses in the rural areas would serve as a means through which the primary produce can be processed into semi or finished goods. The creation of advanced storage facilities in rural areas would also help the farm youth to sell their produce at a more competitive price to the available industries and even for export.

The findings are quite similar to the study conducted by Nnadi *et al.* (2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Investing in young people living in rural areas is the key to enhancing agricultural productivity and food security in addition to boosting rural economies and reducing rural-to-urban migration. Young farmers and producers often have greater capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship than older adults. Due to their limited access to assets (in particular land), markets, finance and education and skills training, rural youth are often unemployed or work informally. If young people living in rural areas do not find enough incentives, profitable economic opportunities and attractive environments in which to live and work, they will continue to migrate to cities. This trend would affect the global food production. The crucial issue of "Who will then feed the global population that is projected to reach 9.2 billion people by 2050?" also arises here. The genuine solution is to invest in 'the rural youth of today, the farmers of tomorrow'.

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